

Shantideva's
Bodhicaryâvatâra

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

Group Study with Venerable Lama Sangyay Tendzin

Chapter Five: Safeguarding alertness

Session 32 - September 25, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

Let us start now with the traditional prayers.

REFUGE | MANDALA | REQUEST for TEACHINGS

Lama's Invocation | Mental Quiescence

Chapter Five - Stanza 31:

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are endowed
With unobstructed vision, everywhere:
I'm always standing
Before the eyes of them all.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas possess at all times unobstructed primordial wisdom. There is not the slightest thing that they do not see and know.

We should therefore consider that we are always in their presence. Indeed, they are with us like people who can see standing amidst the blind.

They have a direct and instantaneous knowledge of all our shortcomings of thought, word, and deed, great or small. It would be quite inappropriate to offend them by our conduct.

Chapter Five - Stanza 32:

Someone thinking like that, would take on, in this way,
Moral self-dignity, respect and dread.
Through this, his close mindfulness of the Buddhas
Would rise up, over and again.

If we think about it over and over and remember the constant presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in our close environment, we will feel a certain awareness, as well as respect for the precepts, and let go of bad behaviour.

Externally too, in relation to others, we will fear offending them and thus acquire a sense of moral decency, which will also curb unhealthy activities. We must always keep ourselves in this state of mind.

If we achieve this, not only will we become mindful, but we will also continually remember the Buddha, one of the six objects associated with the Bodhisattva's precepts: the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, generosity, discipline and the yidam deity.

Chapter Five - Stanza 33:

When mindfulness is set at the gateway of the mind
For the purpose of safeguarding,
Then alertness will come,
And even what's gone will come back again.

When mindfulness, which does not forget the principle of adoption and rejection, is placed as a sentinel at the gates of the mind to prevent the latter from reaching for unwholesome objects, a vigilant introspection that scrutinises all movements of thought, words and deeds, will occur naturally. Would it by any chance be forgotten or scattered, it will come back.

Chapter Five - Stanza 34:

Whenever I've recognized that, at the start,
The way my mind's motivation has some fault,
I shall remain, at those times, like a block of wood,
Able to restrain myself.

We should rely on mindfulness and vigilant introspection, at all times and in all situations. At the outset, we should inspect our minds to see the kind of thoughts that are arising. We should check whether our state of mind is positive or negative.

If it is negative, we must recognize that this is a defect and that it is detrimental to our present and future existences. We must therefore refrain from any action, both physical or verbal and, not allow ourselves to follow this unwholesome mental state.

Instead, we should be like the trunk of a massive tree unmoved by the wind. Keep your mind steadily and do not allow it to be under the influence of negative thoughts, as such thoughts are involved with the objects of the senses.

Hit the boar right on its snout i.e., as soon as you experience bad thoughts, beat them down without delay, acting in accordance with the proverb "clean the lamp when it's still warm" as it is much easier.

Chapter Five - Stanza 35:

I shall never look around
Without any purpose, because of distraction.
With a resolute mind,
I shall always look with my eyes cast downwards.

Shantideva goes on to say that he will never allow his gaze to wander vacantly around. In other words, he will never look at things that are futile or are not in harmony with the Dharma. He will not pretend to be other than he is; he will not create a facade for others to see.

Being convinced of the principle of adopting and rejecting and of the ultimate nature of phenomena, he will look with lowered gaze and half-open eyes fixed upon a point past the tip of his nose or within the scope of his personal aim.

For as it is said, whatever thoughts of craving, aversion, and so on, arise in the mind, the eyes are drawn toward the associated object and the defilements themselves can be visibly discerned in the eyes' expression. It is consequently not advisable to look around with distracted gaze.

Chapter Five - Stanza 36:

But, for the sake of relaxing my gaze,
I'll look around now and then.
And if someone appears in my field of vision,
I shall look up and say, "Welcome."

If you get tired when walking or sitting with such a focused gaze, Shantideva considers that he will raise his eyes and look around, -nevertheless keeping mindful vigilance and without distraction-, just to relax his eyes and mind for a little while.

If someone enters his field of vision, he will much be involved nor annoyed but, with eyes cast down and looking at a point a yoke's length away, he will, according to the local custom, greet him with a friendly word of welcome.

Recognising that current worldly 'custom' in Kaliyuga is essentially based on attachment, aversion and leads to involvement with the senses. However, the custom to adopt with our sangha brothers and sisters, should reflect our inner practice.

It is essential to consider this point and, if not yet done, start adopting a conduct that is supportive of their Dharma practice following Shantideva's advise.

Chapter Five - Stanza 37:

To check for dangers on the road and the like,
I shall look over and again in the four directions.
Then, after pausing, I shall turn round and look
To see what's behind.

When on dangerous paths, he will look in front of him and in all the four directions one by one, slowly, repeatedly, and with undistracted mind to see whether there is any risk.

Especially when he is relaxing, he will not behave in an agitated or careless manner, creating a poor impression in the eyes of others, i.e., playfully parading around, or turning only his head to look behind while still walking.

Instead, he will turn his entire body carefully and consider the situation as he pauses before slowly looking back along the path. In this way, he remains constantly aware of making sure that there is no danger from hostile sources, whether robbers or wild beasts.

This is to be understood both, literally and from the spiritual perspective.

Chapter Five - Stanza 38:

Then having examined both ahead and behind,
I shall either go on or come back.
Thus, shall I act, in all situations,
After knowing what's needed.

He will therefore look around, in front or behind, to determine whether to proceed or to return home.

In every situation, whether he is in town or sitting in the rows of the monks, whether eating or sleeping, walking, or sitting, his unwavering aim is to recognize the crucial needs or aims of himself and others and to act accordingly and with vigilance.

Chapter Five - Stanza 39:

Having paused and decided, "I'll keep my body like this,"
And then jumping back into whatever I'm doing,
Then later, I shall look periodically
At the way in which my body's remaining.

Whether he is in a town or a monastic assembly or in his meditation session, he will begin every action by consciously deciding on the physical attitude he should adopt.

As an example, while meditating, to adopt the seven-point posture of Vairochana with legs crossed in vajrasana and hands in the mudra of equanimity.

Moreover, having done so, from time to time he will check his physical attitude or posture with the highest vigilance.

Chapter Five - Stanza 40:

With the utmost effort, I shall check
That the rutting elephant of my mind
Has not been let loose from how it's been tied
To the great pillar of my Dharma intent.

Shantideva compares his mind to a wild and rambling elephant dominated by craving and aversion. It is aimlessly distracted toward objects of desire and anger. It will draw him into torment in the lower realms, the regions of hell and of the pretas.

If a wild elephant breaks loose from its shackles, it can do enormous damage. It must therefore be tethered very securely.

Therefore, not letting the mind wander abstractedly to external things, he will fasten it with mindfulness and vigilant introspection to the sturdy post of concentration, focusing on exposition, study, and meditation upon the Dharma.

He will devote himself totally to contain his body from all movement, abstain from speaking and reflect one-pointedly on the view, meditation, and action of the sublime Dharma. He will do so without allowing himself to be distracted even for a moment.

We will stop here for today. Having thus acquired a clear understanding of the absolute need to train the mind, and how to carry out this training through mindfulness and alertness.

I invite you to rest a few moments before dedicating the merit of this session for the benefit of all.

